

RTI and the Adolescent Reader: Responsive Literacy Practice in Secondary Schools

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Indicators of Need for Effective Secondary Literacy Programs

- Two-thirds of 8th and 12th grade students read at less than the "proficient" level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009)
- 32% of high school graduates are not adequately prepared for college-level English composition courses (ACT, 2005)
- 40% of high school graduates lack the literacy skills employers seek (National Education Summit on High Schools, 2005)
- 1.2 million students drop out annually, and their literacy skills are lower than most industrialized nations (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007; OECD, 2001).

RTI: A system of instruction and intervention for all students

- Helping adolescent readers, especially those who are struggling, develop high levels of reading and writing competence necessary for advanced educational and occupational opportunities is a demanding task, regardless of the approach or program.
- To be successful, a total commitment is required of all teachers and teacher leaders.
- Growth may not always be as rapid as hoped but is far more likely to occur when secondary teachers, administrators, and support staff dedicate themselves to responsive and culturally sensitive practices for all readers.

RTI: A system of instruction and intervention for all students

- The language of IDEA requires that schools institute preventive measures to reduce the number of students who experience initial failure.
- Within a tiered model of RTI, the frontline of prevention is Tier I or the general education classroom.
- Tier I is where every student regardless of ability is to receive *high quality* instruction.

RTI: A system of instruction and intervention for all students

- RTI approaches in middle and high school contexts will only be as effective as Tier I supports for preventing reading and learning difficulties.
- RTI at the secondary level needs to be a comprehensive program for developing the literacy competencies of all youth.

Complexities of Secondary Schools

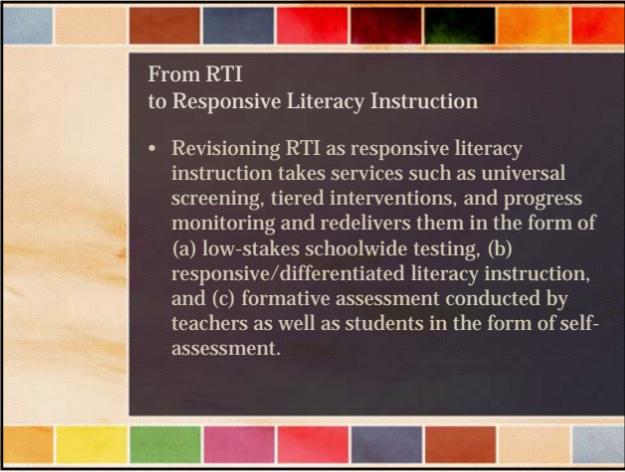
- Most students make a major academic transition when they enter middle school in the United States.
- A new school, a longer school day, moving from classroom to classroom, receiving content instruction from multiple teachers, and keeping up with the demands of increasingly complex assignments that require critical thinking and independent learning skills.
- Even for students without a history of reading and learning difficulties, this transition alone can bring on declines in achievement and motivation.
- The challenges for many youth only increase as they move on to American high schools (Neild, 2009).

Complexities of Secondary Schools

- Secondary classrooms and schools as contexts for RTI-like systems are vastly more complex spaces than their primary- and elementary-level counterparts.
- Factors related to class scheduling, teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward adolescent literacy as well as their perceived areas of expertise, administrative resources and supports, and youth culture and identity will all impinge on the success or failure of programs intended to make responsive literacy instruction available to all.

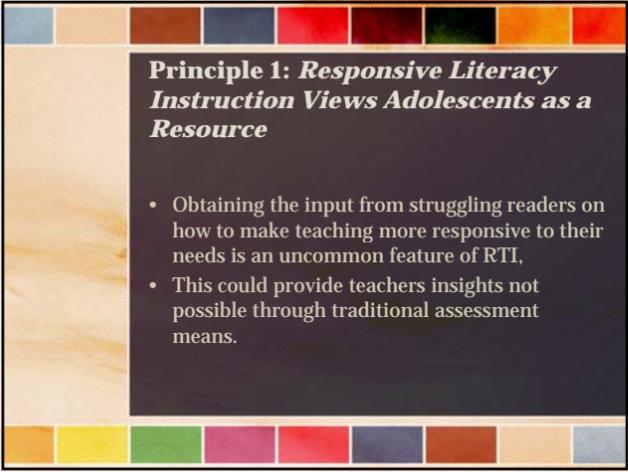
Complexities of Secondary Schools

- Implementation of RTI with existing secondary-school staff involves, among many other things, finding room within the school day for Tier II and III activity and accommodating the class scheduling needs of students.
- The really hard work involves: (1) convincing Tier I teachers of the value of the reforms, (2) requiring disciplinary teachers to become supporters of students' literacy and to differentiate instruction for every student, and (3) providing intensive and ongoing professional development on RTI assessment and instructional practices.



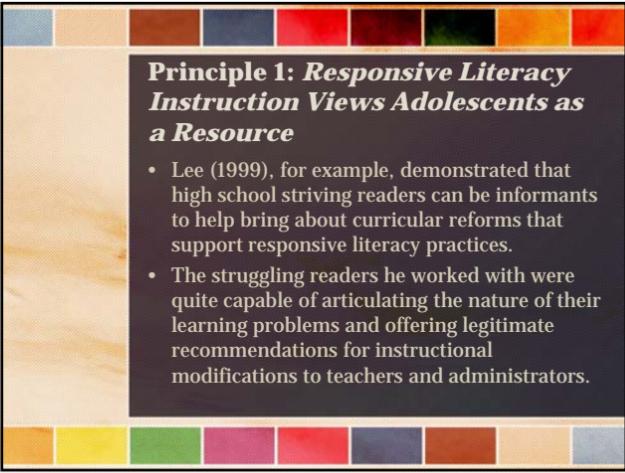
From RTI
to Responsive Literacy Instruction

- Revisioning RTI as responsive literacy instruction takes services such as universal screening, tiered interventions, and progress monitoring and redelivers them in the form of (a) low-stakes schoolwide testing, (b) responsive/differentiated literacy instruction, and (c) formative assessment conducted by teachers as well as students in the form of self-assessment.



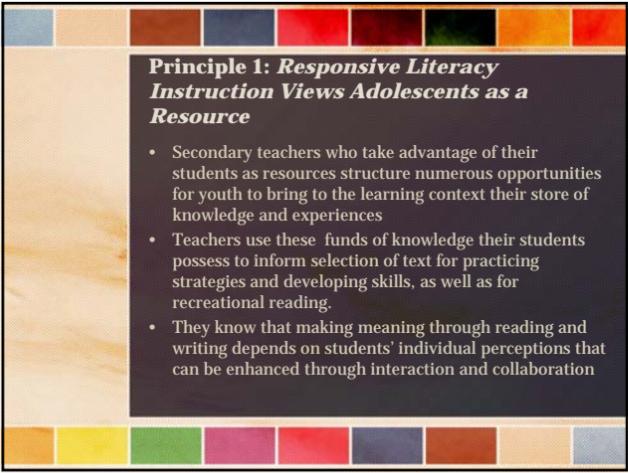
Principle 1: *Responsive Literacy Instruction Views Adolescents as a Resource*

- Obtaining the input from struggling readers on how to make teaching more responsive to their needs is an uncommon feature of RTI,
- This could provide teachers insights not possible through traditional assessment means.



Principle 1: *Responsive Literacy Instruction Views Adolescents as a Resource*

- Lee (1999), for example, demonstrated that high school striving readers can be informants to help bring about curricular reforms that support responsive literacy practices.
- The struggling readers he worked with were quite capable of articulating the nature of their learning problems and offering legitimate recommendations for instructional modifications to teachers and administrators.



Principle 1: *Responsive Literacy Instruction Views Adolescents as a Resource*

- Secondary teachers who take advantage of their students as resources structure numerous opportunities for youth to bring to the learning context their store of knowledge and experiences
- Teachers use these funds of knowledge their students possess to inform selection of text for practicing strategies and developing skills, as well as for recreational reading.
- They know that making meaning through reading and writing depends on students' individual perceptions that can be enhanced through interaction and collaboration

Principle 2: Responsive Literacy Instruction Occurs Within Comprehensive Literacy Programs

- Adolescents who encounter difficulties learning can usually attribute their frustrations to major shortcomings in their reading ability (Hock & Deshler, 2003).
- As students' reading achievement increases so does their performance in all the subject areas.
- The relationship between reading scores and overall grade point average has been well documented in findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003).
- Thus, all teachers regardless of their disciplinary expertise have a stake in the literacy development of youth

Principle 2: Responsive Literacy Instruction Occurs Within Comprehensive Literacy Programs

- If secondary teachers want good students then they must do what they can to help their students become good readers.
- This is especially true for striving readers.
- Helping them become effective learners in content classrooms takes more than the efforts of the reading teacher or literacy coach alone.
- Every adult with whom striving readers interact during the school day shares responsibility for building positive relationships with them, heightening their engagement for learning, expanding their content knowledge, and leavening their literacy skills.

Principle 2: Responsive Literacy Instruction Occurs Within Comprehensive Literacy Programs

- If administrators want teachers who employ responsive literacy practices then they must be leaders of initiatives to expand the literate culture of the school.
- Individual teacher efforts to increase students' reading and writing competency and efficacy are given more energy when they occur within the context of an overall schoolwide program with literacy development as a priority.

Principle 3: Responsive Literacy Instruction Provides Special Supports but not Always Special Settings

- Fisher (2001) and others (Jacobson, Thrope, Fisher, Lapp, Frey, & Flood, 2001; Mastropieri, et.al., 2001) have demonstrated that striving readers are not always best served in pull-out programs and special classes.
- The best approaches to RTI for reading at the secondary level attempt to keep students in the general education classroom as long as possible and return them there quickly if they are pulled out.

Principle 3: Responsive Literacy Instruction Provides Special Supports but not Always Special Settings

- Cross-age tutoring, reading buddies, and a host of instructional modifications within the content classroom itself may do more to increase engagement and achievement.
- This may obviate the need for sequestering youth in homogenous groups of low-ability readers or isolating them for intensive skill work, which often occurs in schools where RTI is practiced.

Principle 3: Responsive Literacy Instruction Provides Special Supports but not Always Special Settings

- Most students who enter the ninth-grade with reading problems leave high school with reading problems (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001)
- The literacy issues striving readers bring to secondary schools are not receiving the attention they deserve.
- Classroom teachers who respond to the literacy needs of their striving readers will ensure they remain a part of the flow of instruction and enjoy the benefits of engaging learning experiences, regular print encounters, and instruction to build disciplinary knowledge.

Principle 4: Responsive Literacy Instruction Includes More than a Curriculum of Basic Skills Redux

- Some adolescents bring remarkably low reading achievement levels to secondary schools.
- This leaves teachers and administrators grabbing for straws to figure out how to elevate ability to help these students survive in content classrooms but also pass mandated standardized tests.

Principle 4: Responsive Literacy Instruction Includes More than a Curriculum of Basic Skills Redux

- Striving readers should not be recycled through a regimen of skill instruction that failed to produce reading competence in the first place
- Skill instruction in an area such as phonics has been shown to be most effective for very young children with diminishing results for students in subsequent grades (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- When instruction in these skills is embedded in meaningful content area reading and learning, youth benefit by improving their ability to construct new understandings (NCTE, 2004).

Principle 4: *Responsive Literacy Instruction Includes More than a Curriculum of Basic Skills Redux*

- It should not be assumed that all striving readers require inordinate structure and routines to expand their language and literacy abilities
- Using reading and writing to help them explore personal interests and satisfy cultural needs can increase their language competence and their engagement in learning

Principle 5: *Responsive Literacy Instruction Comes From Effective Teachers who have the Knowledge and Practices to Address Struggling Adolescent Readers' Needs*

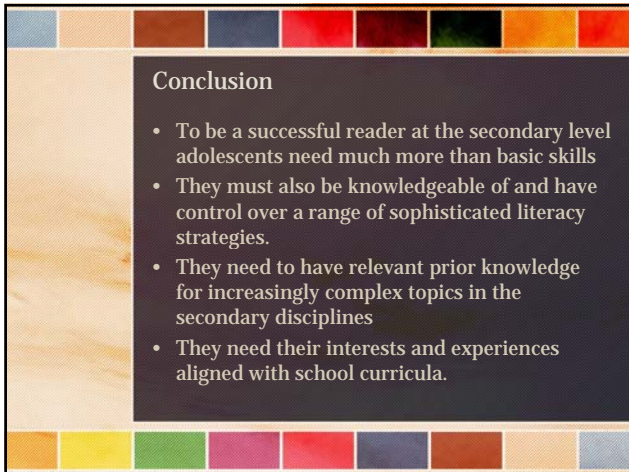
- Nationwide survey of programs and practices in U.S. high schools revealed that most content area teachers do not integrate literacy throughout the curriculum
- Over 40 percent of high school teachers did not feel competent addressing reading problems or planning instruction to foster reading development, while another 30 percent were unsure of their competencies
- Many secondary-level teachers perceive literacy instruction in high school as low priority, unnecessary, the responsibility of an English or reading teacher, or a burdensome addition to an already full workload

Principle 5: *Responsive Literacy Instruction Comes From Effective Teachers who have the Knowledge and Practices to Address Struggling Adolescent Readers' Needs*

- School leaders need to do all they can to bolster teachers' competencies for addressing the literacy and learning needs of their striving students.
- And secondary teachers themselves need to accept personal responsibility for expanding their knowledge and abilities not only related to disciplinary literacy but also differentiated instruction.

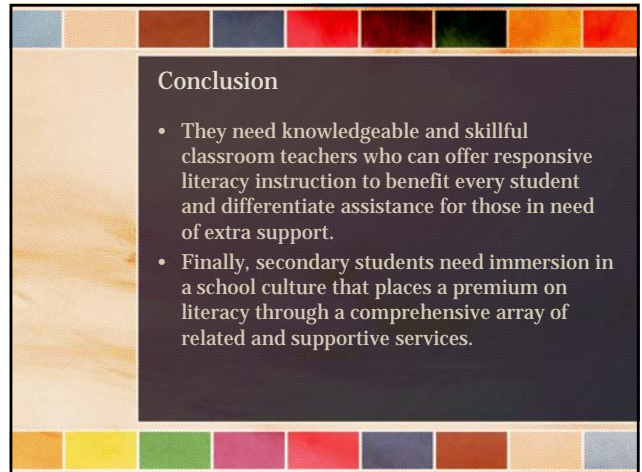
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- High school disciplinary teachers who focus on the academic welfare of striving English learners are capable of developing creative practices that integrated language and content
- RTI-like approaches at the secondary level will never achieve the level of success we hope for if teachers are not highly prepared and dispositionally given to responsive literacy instruction for all.



Conclusion

- To be a successful reader at the secondary level adolescents need much more than basic skills
- They must also be knowledgeable of and have control over a range of sophisticated literacy strategies.
- They need to have relevant prior knowledge for increasingly complex topics in the secondary disciplines
- They need their interests and experiences aligned with school curricula.



Conclusion

- They need knowledgeable and skillful classroom teachers who can offer responsive literacy instruction to benefit every student and differentiate assistance for those in need of extra support.
- Finally, secondary students need immersion in a school culture that places a premium on literacy through a comprehensive array of related and supportive services.

Youth are our hope for the future...

You are their hope today!

Thank you!

